



GENERAL ACTIVITY UPDATE

August 2007 • Issue 4

BUSH AND KARZAI HOLD JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE AT CAMP DAVID

Presidents George Bush and Hamid Karzai held a joint press conference on Monday, Aug. 6 at Camp David. The two leaders discussed accomplishments in Afghanistan, including health advances in the country. Bush noted that the U.S. has committed over \$23 billion since 2001 to help rebuild Afghanistan, \$4.4 billion via the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID's efforts have included training over 10,600 health workers that provide health care to more than 625,000 people per month. Karzai thanked the U.S. for its continued support and stated, "Afghanistan today, with the help that you have provided and our other allies have provided ... is saving the life of at least 50,000 infants after they are born and the life of 85,000 children under 5."

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– President Hamid Karzai

CHAMKANI HOSPITAL NOW OPERATIONAL

A USAID-funded rehabilitation of Chamkani Hospital, the second largest health care facility in the politically charged Paktia Province, has provided lifesaving health-care to 60,000 people. The hospital provides emergency and non-emergency medical services for families within the remote Paktia and its neighboring provinces. Chamkani Hospital has a medical team of 10 resident doctors, including one female doctor and one surgeon. Local laborers were contracted to complete major repairs.



Photo: IOM Gardez

Chamkani Hospital, the second largest healthcare facility in Paktia Province, is now operational.



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

Dr. Faizullah Kakar speaks at a technical health discussion hosted by USAID and the Embassy of Afghanistan on July 18.

DEPUTY MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH VISITS WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH

His Excellency Dr. Faizullah Kakar, Deputy Minister for Public Health for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, visited Washington July 14-20 as a guest of USAID. The Deputy Minister, accompanied by USAID Senior Health Advisors Dr. Faiz Mohammad and Gary Cook, briefed staff of the two House Committees, the World Bank, the State Department, the Department of Health and various other government agencies. Dr. Kakar also conducted live interviews with Voice of America's Ashna television and radio shows in Dari and Pashto.

Dr. Kakar and Dr. Faiz Mohammad were the premier speakers at a technical discussion hosted by USAID and the Embassy of Afghanistan entitled, "Afghanistan Now: On the Path to Better Health." The event also featured Dr. Gilbert Burnham of Johns Hopkins University, who presented recent findings of a significant decline in infant mortality and improved access to health care.

The study confirms that USAID support to the Government of Afghanistan has resulted in expanded access to a basic package of health services. Afghanistan has witnessed a significant reduction in child mortality from 257 deaths per 1,000 live births among children under five in 2002 to 191 per 1,000 in 2006 (compared to 7 per 1,000 in the U.S.). Access to basic healthcare has increased from less than 10% of the population in 2002 to more than 80% of the population today.



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TRAINING PROGRAMS EDUCATE JUDGES AND LAWYERS ABOUT COURT SYSTEM

USAID, in partnership with the Afghan Supreme Court and Ministry of Justice, offered its first Commercial Law Training Program this summer for civil and commercial judges and government lawyers. Thirty-two judges selected by the Afghan Supreme Court and 25 members of the Ministry of Justice Taqin and Hoqooq Departments graduated from the Commercial Law Training Program better able to navigate—and improve—Afghanistan's commercial court system.

Participants attended lectures by experts from the Afghan judiciary, professors from Kabul University, and international experts on best practice and alternative dispute resolution. Plans are currently underway for a second commercial law training program in the fall for judges located in Afghanistan's provinces.

USAID also ran another month-long basic judicial training program in July. Thirty-three judges—including 30 men and 3 women from 11 provinces—graduated from the 14th Foundation Training Program on July 31. During the four weeks, the judges studied Afghanistan's civil law, civil procedure, penal law, criminal procedure, commercial law, commercial procedure, the Afghan constitution, juvenile law, deeds, and principles of a fair trial. The next Foundation Training is scheduled for August in Herat.



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

Afghan judges and lawyers receive a month of USAID-provided training on commercial law.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRESS TO DATE:

- Assisting the Electoral Commission to prepare for 2009 elections
- Strengthening the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission
- Provided logistical support and assistance to successful Emergency, Constitutional and Peace Loya Jirgas in 2003, 2004 and 2007
- Trained over 980 aspiring justices to date
- Trained 215 local NGOs, provided \$6.2 million in grants to local NGOs, benefiting over 50,000
- Supported over 30 community radio stations and trained over 550 journalists
- Built or substantially renovated 40 justice facilities in 18 provinces

CIVIL SOCIETY WORKSHOP HELD FOR GOVERNMENT MEDIA

In collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), USAID convened a workshop for nearly 100 participants including 68 Provincial Directors from the MoIC. The goal of this workshop was to improve communication, to develop collaborative relationships, and to foster greater understanding between government media and civil society organizations (CSOs).

Basher Ahmad Shabeer, the Director General of the Bakhtar Information Agency, attended the workshop and noted that it boosted his confidence in NGOs and CSOs. "All of the participants gained an understanding of civil society organizations, their activities, and how they operate," he said, adding that he especially valued "the comprehensive and in-depth information about the government, private and civil society sectors." Ahmad also indicated that by bringing representatives of government and civil society media together, the workshop did much to negate misperceptions at the policy level.



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JOURNALISTS COMPLETE LEGAL AWARENESS TRAINING

Nineteen journalists from throughout Afghanistan recently completed the six-day USAID-supported Training on Justice Sector Reporting for Provincial Journalists. Over the course of the training, the journalists increased their understanding of legal journalism and their capacity to interpret and share information about Afghanistan's developing legal system and the legal rights of Afghan citizens. The training covered such legal issues as what constitutes a fair trial, how the appeals process works, and the critical distinctions between being accused of, suspected of, and guilty of a crime.

For many of the participating journalists, this seminar was their first formal introduction to how the legal system works in post-Taliban Afghanistan. "[We] should know how the judiciary works," said Muhammed Kamran, a journalist from Parwan province, noting that with this new knowledge the journalists' reporting would be better informed than in the past.

ROAD UPDATE

Ring Road: Construction on the Japanese section (Section 1) of the Kandahar to Herat highway is progressing. 10 km of the 50 km section have been paved. Construction is slated for completion by end of 2008, as stipulated in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Provincial roads: 735 km have been completed as of the end of August 2007. The Panjshir Road has been completed, cutting travel time from Kabul to Panjshir by at least half. The Jalalabad-Asmar road was completed in April 2007.

Southern Strategy Roads: 22km of the 94-kilometer Segment 1 was completed by the UN Office for Project Services and is ready to be inaugurated. USAID has initiated discussions with local political leaders to determine whether the affected community can restore minimum levels of security and allow the work to resume. The US Army Corps of Engineers expects to issue the construction contract for Segment 3 (67kms) in early September.



Photo: Mohammad Azal Muhsini, Office of Infrastructure, Engineering & Energy (OIEE)

School students sing the Afghan national anthem during the Faizabad Connector Road opening ceremony in Jawzjan province's Faizabad district.

JAWZJAN PROVINCE INAUGURATES FAIZABAD CONNECTOR ROAD

On July 18, 2007, the recently completed Faizabad Connector Road was inaugurated by Parliamentarian Fahima Sadat and Acting Provincial Governor Faqir Mohd Khan. Funded by USAID, this road strengthens the link between the Faizabad District Center and the Mazar-e-Sharif to Shiberghan highway. Approximately 31,500 residents of the Faizabad District depend on the road services to meet their daily needs. With the new road, residents gain improved access to the main Mazar-Shiberghan highway, increasing their access to market facilities and other businesses and services located in the cities and settlements along the highway. This 1.8 km paved road also decreases health and sanitation risks by reducing dust and mud.

The project generated 3,200 hours of employment for the community, injecting income directly into the district. The road is just one of many USAID projects in the area. Since 2002, USAID has contributed \$26 million in aid to Jawzjan and \$21 million to Balkh and may be able to increase that amount if the provinces remain poppy-free. Upcoming projects include an increase in commercial farming, food processing and packaging capabilities, and training farmers in agri-business and sustainable farming techniques.



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TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENTS

On June 10th, the Minister of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), the mayor of Kabul and other Government officers inaugurated a project to expand fixed line telephone coverage across Afghanistan.

This project is another step forward to expanding access to modern information and communications services across Afghanistan. Providing ordinary citizens with access to economic infrastructure is crucial to market integration, attracting private investment and facilitating international trade.

PROMISING CROP FORECASTS IN THE EAST

USAID agronomists forecast that farmers would produce 42,500 metric tons of onions and 23,000 metric tons of potatoes this season. These products are right now entering the market. USAID is supporting traders from Jalalabad to export potatoes and onions to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These exports fulfill a dual purpose. They will enable traders to establish links with buyers in the region and will reduce the over-supply of produce on the local market allowing the farmers to earn a better income.

A Vegetable Marketing Team is currently selecting beneficiaries for its fall season program, which will integrate several thousand medium-scale farmers to the global value chains for high-value vegetables. This is an expansion of the spring-season program that worked with 1,500 farmers.

USAID is also selecting beneficiaries for its 2008 fruit tree planting campaign. This program, aimed at facilitating the establishment of commercial fruit and nut orchards, provides an 80% subsidy on the price of saplings. USAID is coordinating the participation of orchard owners in vegetable programs as a way to generate additional income while waiting for fruit and nut orchards to come into production. This integration has been well-received by farmers and has encouraged participation in USAID's perennial horticulture programs.



Photo: Sharif Usmani

Drying of export quality apricots, Wardak, July 2007.

USAID HELPS FARMERS GROW EXPORT QUALITY APRICOTS

USAID is supporting a private sector/NGO partnership to train apricot growers from Wardak in improved sulfuring, drying, and packing of export quality apricots. More than 200 farmers are being trained to produce high value dried apricots and demand is increasing—another 100 farmers from neighboring villages have requested to be included. Based on the first year's production, the private sector trader involved in the program is planning to export Wardak dried apricots to Europe.

Amanulla of Shabaz Kahn observed, "Such programs will improve the security here." He also noted that they will act as a deterrent to men who might otherwise have joined the Taliban in order to support their families.

The farmers from Wardak province realize that this USAID initiative has implications beyond its immediate economic benefits. "Such programs will improve the security here," says Amanullah of Shabaz Kahn. By learning how to increase the value of their products, the farmers of Wardak can work to solve their economic and security problems.